

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 144 061

CS 203 586

AUTHOR Verner, Zenobia, Ed.
 TITLE Writing.
 INSTITUTION Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English,
 Houston.
 PUB DATE 77
 NOTE 25p.; The Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English
 is an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers
 of English; references may not reproduce well due to
 small type
 JOURNAL CIT English in Texas; v8 n3 Entire Issue Spr 1977
 EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Centers of Interest; *Composition (Literary);
 *Composition Skills (Literary); Creative Writing;
 *English Instruction; Expository Writing; Failure
 Factors; Feedback; Folk Culture; Higher Education;
 Literature Reviews; Secondary Education; *Teaching
 Techniques; Visual Stimuli

ABSTRACT

The articles in this journal focus on the teaching of composition at the secondary and college levels. Separate articles deal with the causes of poor proofreading by students and methods for teaching proofreading skills; the use of folklore as an aid to teaching composition; techniques for overcoming students' fear of failure in the writing classroom; teaching techniques developed for a workshop course in creative writing; the use of student-interest stations in the teaching of expository writing; a program in which students explore elements of visual art and then describe their visual experiences in writing; and a review of research on the effect of feedback on student writing. (GW)

 * Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
 * materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
 * to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
 * reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
 * of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
 * via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
 * responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
 * supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *



ENGLISH IN TEXAS

Spring, 1977
Volume 8
Number 3

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND
USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM"

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN-
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT
OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Writing

Contributors:

Thomas L. Franke
Peggy Skaggs
Elizabeth Carros Keroack
Jean Moore
Jane M. Agee
Marguerite McMurtrie Bean
Daniel R. Wolter
Walter J. Lamberg
Ree Walker Aguirre
Lawrence Clayton
Joe Holley
J. F. Peirce

Editor

Zenobia Verner, University of Houston, C & I Department, Houston, Texas 77004

Associate Editors

Ron Lindsey, Pasadena Independent School District, 3010 Bayshore Drive, Pasadena, Texas 77502

Mary Beth Bauer, Aldine ISD, 14910 Aldine-Westfield Rd. Houston, 77032

Student Editors

Pat Williams, Karen Duke (UH)

Editorial Consultants

Vera Hutchison, C & I, University of Houston, Houston, 77004

Ernestine P. Sewell, University of Texas at Arlington, 76019

Pat Sullivan, West Texas State University, Canyon, 79015

Anne Terry, University of Houston at Clear Lake City, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, 77058

Executive Board

Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English
1977-78

Executive Committee

President: James W. Culp, College of Arts and Sciences, Texas Tech University, Lubbock 79409, (806) 742-3831

President-Elect: Alberta Maddox, Box 1593, Kingsville, 78363

Vice-President, Membership: Evelyn McMillen, 6010 Royal Crest Drive, Dallas 75230 (214) 361-1219

Vice-President, Programs: Deurene Morgan, North East ISD, 10333 Broadway, San Antonio (512) 655-4210

Vice-President, Workshops: Martha R. Thomas, 3501 South 1st #102, Austin 78704 (512) 441-2254

Corresponding Secretary: Ann L. Jensen, 720 Stadium Drive, Garland ISD, Garland 75040 (214) 494-3466

Recording Secretary: Johnnie Jetton, 2514 Yellowstone, Denton 76201

Treasurer: W. B. Dickey, 4013 48th Street, Lubbock 79413

Ex-Officio

Executive Secretary: Fred Tarpley, Department of Literature and Languages, East Texas State University, Commerce 75428 (214) 468-5136

English in Texas, editor: Zenobia Verner, University of Houston, Curriculum and Instruction Department, Houston 77004 (713) 749-3565

NCTE Liaison: Gale Cateilly, Galena Park ISD, P.O. Box 565, Galena Park 77547 (713) 672-7491

Past President: Goldie West, Fort Worth ISD, 3210 West Lancaster, Fort Worth 76107

Affiliate Representatives

Greater Dallas Council: Thelma Davis, 7106 Indian Ridge Trail, Dallas 75232

Fort Worth Council: Mary Jo Clegg, 4424 Inwood Road, Fort Worth 76109

Houston Area Council: Vincent D'Amico, 6207 Reed Road, Houston 77017

Northeast Texas Area Council: Joanne Cockeiras, Department of Literature and Languages, East Texas State University, Commerce 75428

Rio Grande Valley Council: Margaret Baltis, Department of English, Pan American University, Edinburg 78539

San Antonio Area Council: Florence Lieb, San Antonio College, 1300 San Pedro, San Antonio 78284

Southeast Texas Council: Kaaren Kline, P.O. Box 987, Bridge City 77611

South Plains Area Council: Joy Kilgore, 4315 31st Street, Lubbock 79410

Spring Branch Council: Sheila Ford, Spring Branch ISD, 955 Campbell Road, Houston 77024 (713) 771-6907

Tyler-Longview Area Council: Billie Lofton, Pine Tree High School, Box 5878, Longview 75601

Membership Committee Representatives

Four-Year College: Arney Strickland, Department of English, Lamar University, Beaumont 77710 (3-30-78)

Two-Year College: Betty Bleeker, 1011 East Fannin, Beeville 78102, (512) 358-3828
Supervisors: Pat Farley, Alief ISD, Alief 77411 (3-30-80)

Elementary: Vera Hutchison, University of Houston, Houston 77004 (3-30-79)

Secondary: Maxine Inteso, Boulder Junior High School, Tyler 75701 (3-30-80)

Regional Representatives

Central: Robert Gentry, 216 Faye, Waco 76705 (3-30-79)

East: Joan Schlotter, 317 Turner, Huntsville 77340 (3-30-78)

North: Pat Mengwasser, Hurst-Bedford-Eules ISD, 1849 Central Drive, Bedford 76021 (3-30-78)

South: Mavis Brown, Drawer 110, Corpus Christi 78403 (3-30-79)

West: Phillis Conner, Box 366, Alpine 79830 (915) 837-2752

Standing Committee Chairmen

Budget: Ed Kotch, 1413 Noble, Texas City 77590

Elections: F. Allen Briggs, 409 Surry, Laredo 78041

Publications: Ron Lindsey, Pasadena ISD, 3010 Bayshore Drive, Pasadena 77502

State of the Profession: Dimple E. Hutchings, Longview High School, Longview 75601

ENGLISH IN TEXAS

Volume 8, Number 3

Spring, 1977

writing

Proofreading: Implications of
Psycho-Linguistic Reading Theory 51
THOMAS L. FRANKE

Folklore: Springboard to Composition 53
PEGGY SKAGGS

Fear of Failure in the
Writing Classroom:
Cause and Effect 57
ELIZABETH CARROS KEROACK

A Touch of Class:
Prerequisites for the
Writers' Workshop 58
JEAN MOORE

Teaching Expository Writing
with Student Interest Stations 63
JANE M. AGEE

The Viewer—The Reader 64
MARGUERITE MCMURTRIE BEAN

The Effect of Feedback on Writing:
Research Review and
Implications 67
DANIEL R. WOLTER
WALTER J. LAMBERG

Texans Write:
F. ALLEN BRIGGS

Competency Based Reading 70
REE WALKER ACQUIRRE

Three Sons of the Land 70
LAWRENCE CLAYTON

Neglected Heroes of Texas 71
JOE HOLLEY

Don't Be Afraid to Break the Rules! 72
J. F. PEIRCE

Member NCTE Information Exchange Agreement

ENGLISH IN TEXAS is the official journal of the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English, affiliate of NCTE. The views expressed are the contributor's own and are not necessarily those of the publishers or the editors. All manuscripts and correspondence about the publication should be addressed to Zenobia Verner, C & I, University of Houston, Houston, Texas 77004.

ENGLISH IN TEXAS is published quarterly by the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English and the University of Houston. Payment of membership fee of \$5.00 entitles members to all regular Council publications. Libraries may subscribe at the rate of \$5.00 per year. Students studying to become teachers of English are offered a reduced rate of \$2.50 per year if the application is accompanied by an instructor's signature. Single copies are available for \$1.00 each while supply lasts. Send membership applications and fees to TJCTE Executive Secretary.

Copyright 1977

Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English

PROOFREADING: implications of psycho-linguistic reading theory

Thomas L. Franke

English teachers can develop ulcers trying to get students to proofread. Despite threats, pleas, and the bold inscription "**Proofread**" scrawled atop freshman themes, it seems almost impossible to get some students to check their work. In faculty lounges across the country, professors complain of student carelessness, and in conferences students themselves groan over the "careless" errors in their papers. In such moments of despair, we may alternately blame parental permissiveness and the passivity induced by television culture for the current state of student writing and wishfully seek to exchange the freshman English requirement for a course in personal and mental hygiene.

The theory that student apathy or carelessness causes much poor student writing is an inviting one because it absolves English teachers of responsibility for finding solutions to many writing problems. Nevertheless, despite rather extensive studies of the types of errors students make, recorded in Lyman's 1929 monograph and continuing to the present day, little research has been done seeking the causes of these errors.¹ There are two general assumptions which underlie virtually all of the existing methodologies for teaching accurate usage in writing. They are that 1) students make errors because they do not know the correct forms of standard usage, and 2) students make errors because they are careless. Most current texts are devoted to eradication of the first cause of error—lack of knowledge. I am concerned here only with the second supposed cause—carelessness, a problem few texts or teachers treat except in the most cursory manner, and, even then, primarily through moral indignation, varying degrees of impatience, and ultimately through the convenient method of punishment in the form of assigning F's to papers. These methods rest on assumptions we make about what students do and do not do in the process of writing, assumptions supported only by our own subjective judgments of the students themselves. Most important, our methods for treating "carelessness" assume that students know how to be careful.

Among the ranks of the careless, there are, of course, some genuinely lazy, indifferent, and slovenly members, and the best of these may change their behavior after receiving a few F's. However, in the

course of extensive work with remedial comp students in one-to-one conferences, I find that there are students who do proofread, as sincerely and painstakingly as they can, yet who continue to produce "careless" errors, frequently twenty or more times in a single 500-word essay. Often these same students can score 80% or better on usage quizzes over the same errors found in their writing. Often, they are able to correct the errors once isolated by the teacher. They are not, however, able to find the errors themselves. They can read sections of their papers aloud to the teacher repeatedly, and the errors will not be read. Usually, I must physically point to exact errors before students will recognize them at all.

At the root of the type of writing problem I have described is a reading problem, but not, as we might assume, the problem of "careless" reading. For too long we have assumed that reading is a process of recognition of isolated words, individually perceived and then built into meaning much as a building is constructed of individual bricks. Recent research into the reading process by psycholinguists refutes this concept of reading. As Kenneth S. Goodman, a leader in current research, observes, "Such a view is not consistent with the actual performance of proficient readers."² Good readers, Goodman finds, select the minimum number of cues (such as word perceptions, syntactic signals, and semantic markers) to comprehend the meaning of a passage. "Careful" readers, if by that we mean readers who carefully look at each word and analytically follow the syntax of each sentence, are not only likely to be slow, but they will probably also not comprehend much. Good readers, on the other hand, may be quite "careless" while comprehending a great deal. Thus, good readers will be relatively unbothered by mechanical problems in a manuscript because they will find adequate cues to establish the meaning despite the mechanical deficiencies of the text.

The skills of good readers, which exist to varying degrees among our students, are, then, precisely the opposite of the skills needed by good proofreaders. Proofreading, in fact, is a highly specialized reading skill, and one which therefore demands specific instruction and training before success can be

achieved. Most English teachers have probably developed the skill as a result of hours of paper grading which force them to learn how to read simultaneously for content and mechanics. Yet most teachers can probably remember a time early in their careers when they had to read papers twice, once for content and once for mechanics. This skill which we develop over a period of time and which we spend a major part of our working lives practicing cannot be developed by students overnight. Nevertheless, to teach proofreading explicitly through reprimand or implicitly by repeatedly returning papers covered with red marks is neither systematic nor efficient for either students or teachers. The standard usage drills we offer our students are also useless when poor proofreading skills cause the students' problems. Some workbook exercises isolate errors for students, thus relieving them of the very task which they need to practice. Other common exercises limit the errors by presenting only a specific type of problem (for example, "Identify fragment, comma splice, or sentence") whereas in their actual writing students must identify errors from a virtually unlimited field of possibilities. Consider, for example, the number of possible errors in a 500-word essay. Although the number is no doubt finite, it is immense, including at least the total number of letters, syntactic signals, semantic markers and phrase structure rules employed in the writing, not to mention those features not employed but possible and perhaps preferable in the mind of the teacher.

Fortunately, most students do not produce anywhere near their potential in proofreading-type errors, and those which do appear tend to be of the same type. Given these happy circumstances, whatever their cause, we can provide students with systematic methods of proofreading which are suited to the students' individual needs. In conjunction with my colleague in developmental English at Frostburg State, Ms. Molly W. Burnham, I have found several techniques which develop student proofreading skills. All these techniques assume the student has already proofread for content and organization. Proofreading for mechanics is the final stage of the writing process and may be reserved for the final rough copy and final draft of a theme. Students should never proofread simultaneously for content and mechanics. In fact, the reading principle behind all the effective techniques discussed below is that all interfere with comprehension, thus forcing students to forget about what they said and concern themselves exclusively with the mechanics of the paper.

Probably the most generally effective proofreading technique is that of reading the paper aloud. One oral reading should be slow and deliberate and, for those students who tend to omit words, it should be word-for-word, perhaps including finger-pointing. Such reading will often isolate errors in word form, such as failures to add proper word endings, endings which students "subconsciously" supply through contextual clues when reading at a normal rate. Students should also read their papers aloud at a normal rate, listening for punctuation sig-

nals, such as pauses and drops in pitch. Awkward reading, stumbling, and inability to read on smoothly and continuously are good indications of errors. Students who do not recognize spelling errors can be taught to frame problem words with their two pointer fingers, then pronounce them exactly as written, syllable by syllable. Even though English spelling does not correspond exactly with sound, letter reversals and omitted syllables may often be detected through careful oral pronunciation.

A variation on proofreading aloud is proofreading into a tape recorder. After recording papers, students watch their manuscripts during playback to see if the text conforms to the reading. Wherever there is a variance, an error is likely. Weaker readers—who may experience difficulty reading aloud and listening at the same time for juncture, pitch, or stumbling—benefit especially from use of the recorder because it separates a complex activity into two simpler ones.

In certain situations, such as during examinations, students will not be able to proofread aloud. However, with practice in oral proofreading, students can develop enough proficiency to substitute "lip-reading" for oral reading. Another method easily adapted to the exam room is that of reading backwards, sentence by sentence. This reading method breaks the continuity of ideas and forces students to look at each sentence as an isolated unit. Thus, it is especially effective for identifying comma splices, fused sentences, and fragments.

The methods presented here are by no means definitive ones. No doubt other teachers have similar and even better ones already in use. The important point to remember in teaching proofreading is that it is a specialized reading skill, one which requires time and practice. In calling for specific instruction in proofreading, I should emphasize that such instruction is not a panacea for all writing problems. Although nearly all students can benefit from training in proofreading and a few will be "saved" by it, errors resulting from other causes will persist. Proofreading errors will usually occur along with errors based on lack of knowledge of or familiarity with standard English usage. Nonetheless, by identifying causes of errors, rather than just the errors themselves, teachers and students alike can be saved many hours of unnecessary remediation directed at the symptom rather than the cause of the writing problem. □

Notes

¹ See R. L. Lyman, *Summary of Investigations Relating to Grammar, Language, and Composition*, Supplementary Educational Monographs, no. 36 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1929) and Richard Braddock, et al, *Research in Written Composition* (Champaign, Illinois: NCTE, 1963).

² Kenneth S. Goodman, "Behind the Eye: What Happens in Reading" in Kenneth S. Goodman and Olive S. Niles, *Reading: Process and Program* (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1970), p. 20.

• Thomas L. Franke teaches developmental English at Frostburg State College, Frostburg, Maryland.

FOLKLORE

springboard to composition*

Peggy Skaggs

Are you interested in finding an approach to teaching composition that is adaptable to any age group, that has the atmosphere of a game, and that frees you from the time-consuming task of producing materials? A method that places the burden of creating raw materials on the student? Folklore, I have found, can be a teaching tool offering such advantages.

The first step toward utilizing this method is to arrive at some fairly definite notion of what the term "folklore" means. Since Funk & Wagnalls *Standard Dictionary of Folklore* lists twenty-one separate definitions for the term, some explanation seems to be called for; and the definition developed by Jan Harold Brunvand in *The Study of American Folklore, an Introduction* is the most helpful I have found. Perhaps I can best explain his use of the term through some examples.

Quickly, how many days are in November? How do you know? Is it because "Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November?" Or do you remember by naming your knuckles to match the names of the months? These are both mnemonic, or memory, devices. And you learned them from the people among whom you grew up. They represent a bit of the lore, or wisdom, of your own folk group. These mnemonic devices display the characteristics of folklore: that is, they are passed on to others either orally or by means of customary demonstration and imitation; they are traditional, being passed on repeatedly in a relatively fixed form and being circulated among members of a particular group; they exist in different versions, because of the characteristic of oral transmission; they are usually anonymous; and they tend to become formularized.

Generally speaking, then, Brunvand defines folklore as "those materials in culture that circulate traditionally among members of any group in different versions, whether in oral form or by means of customary example."

Here is another example to illustrate the meaning of "folklore." What do two fingers held up to form a "V" mean to you? What does this gesture mean to a World War II veteran? To a Viet Nam veteran? To a Cub Scout? To a Den Mother? To a truck driver? The meaning one attaches to a bit of lore, then, is likely to depend upon the folk group to which he belongs.

We all belong to a number of folk groups. Four major kinds of American folk groups are easily identifiable: occupational groups, age groups, regional groups, and ethnic or nationality groups. Sometimes it is also possible to distinguish folk groups that are set apart by religion, education, hobbies, neighborhood, or even family. The first, and probably the only real, test of a folk group is the existence of shared folklore.

And to clear up the misconception that the "folk" are all illiterate mountaineers in Kentucky or somewhere, consider the story, heard regularly on college campuses, about the professor talking with a student. The prof asks which direction he was going when they met and, after being told the answer, sighs, "Oh, good. Then I've already eaten lunch." Or, to take another example from academe, there is the story of the pretty girl who visits her teacher in his office, declaring with a blush that she'll do anything to get a good grade in his course. Closing the door softly, he asks, "Anything???" She insists, "Yes, anything!" And so the prof murmurs in her ear, "Then, why don't you try . . . studying??"

Of course, such stories about teachers and students have been circulating for generations. But newer concerns have their own stories as well, proving beyond doubt that folklore is a living reality, not a mere relic from the past. For instance, here's a modern riddle: what is a Watergate cocktail? Answer: it's a glass of water with a bug in it. And another, what is black and blue and goes "ding-dong?" Answer: a beat-up Avon lady.

Of course, most readers of *English in Texas* are members of the same occupational group; and as

*Presented to a session of the TJCTE convention in Fort Worth, February 1977.

suggested by the jokes about professors, the teacher-group does certainly pass that single test of a folk group: it does share a distinct body of lore. The cultural elements that bind teachers together, like those uniting any group, derive from a shared series of live experiences—fears, hopes, and frustrations. Within the educational world, there are of course many sub-groups—students, teachers, administrators, coaches, to name a few. But, these smaller groups themselves also contain further sub-groups. For instance, among teachers, English teachers comprise a distinct group whose members share certain oral traditional materials. We English teachers love to tell the joke about the star football player who gets such rave notices in the press that someone asks the coach if he isn't afraid that all the publicity will go to the boy's head. The coach, of course, drawls, "Naw, he cain't read." We English teachers tell this joke to illustrate the sort of frustrations we encounter in our work; but members of another group may tell it so that it reflects negatively upon us.

And this fact illustrates another point about folklore. It is oral, and the manner of the telling—gesturing, grimacing, etc.—is as much a part of the lore as the actual material itself.

So, reiterating, folklore is cultural materials, and it always has three qualities: it is passed on orally or by demonstration; it is traditional, being passed on repeatedly among members of a particular group; it exists in different versions. It is usually anonymous and formularized, though one or even both of these last two qualities may occasionally be lacking.

Now, this definition is very broad and inclusive. After all, what is not capable of being included under the name of "cultural materials?" But this breadth is entirely appropriate. The folk apply the group wisdom to the entire scope of life as they see it, and they see it from the unique perspective of membership within their particular group. So, we have as folklore all the arts, crafts, and skills that are taught and learned within a traditional group by means of customary example or demonstration; we have all the wisdom that is passed on orally, including everything from how to cure warts (in the backwoods) to how to deal with cheating students (in the classroom). We have all the amusements, games, jokes, and stories that lighten (or enlighten) life for members of any particular group. All these materials may be folklore, and many others besides.

But, getting back to the primary topic, what use can the English teacher make of such materials? Creativity, it seems to me, lies at the heart of the writing process, whether the product be a lyric poem, a novel, a love letter, a theme, or even a research paper. After all, one of the primary tasks in writing a good research paper is to synthesize the many ideas gathered together—and creativity has been defined by many poets (Shelley comes particularly to mind) as essentially a process of synthesizing ideas into newly meaningful patterns. So, any device that sparks creativity is helpful in teaching composition. Folklore can provide that spark, giving the students "something to write about," even something they want to write about. Of

course, the particular approach teachers take to using folklore, like the approach to any method, will vary according to a number of factors, including especially the age level of the students. But since each age group is also a folk group, this method is adaptable to students of all ages.

My own experience has been in using folklore as an aid in teaching composition to college freshmen and to students in American folklore. But I have had several former students who built the main unit in their student teaching course around a folklore project, and they have reported exciting results in seventh, tenth, and twelfth grades.

An out-and-out folklore collecting project early in the semester gets my freshmen off to a flying start. I try to introduce the unit as specifically as possible, being careful at the same time not to get bogged down in irrelevant technicalities. The objective is not at all to teach students what folklore is, but rather to lead them to discover that they have something interesting to write about; and I try to keep that objective clear in my own mind so that we don't get sidetracked into quibbling about what is and what is not folklore.

I explain what folklore is and ask each student to bring to class the next day one item that illustrates the definition. They bring things like quilts, jokes, pottery, soul food, hand-made jewelry, paintings, candles, shuck dolls, string games; and in every group someone comes up with something never brought before. They explain orally the *context* in which each item was found or created and identify the folk *group* from which it came. This "show and tell" day is always fun, and by the time it's over even the coolest students have usually warmed to the topic. If I were teaching middle-school or high-school students we might arrange a display of these items for other students or parents; we might even arrange a mini-festival with folk foods, games, dances, or music for the annual parents' night that many schools have.

The students also identify some of their own folk group affiliations at this "show and tell" time. This identification is easily done through oral discussion or through the use of simple questionnaires that lead the students to recognize their own occupational, regional, ethnic, and age identities.

By the time students have shown and explained their examples of folklore and have identified some of their own folk group affiliations, they have sufficient knowledge of what folklore is to get right into their collecting projects. Often I give them a list of possible projects similar to the ones in Appendix I, just to get their thinking started. I certainly never limit them to those topics on the list, though, because the main idea is to get them involved. I do insist that students in the group each choose a different sort of project, so that they will have significant individual contributions to make to the folk group that the class itself is.

These collection projects may center around folk groups, with individual students collecting different types of lore from one of the folk groups to which they belong. For instance, a German-American may collect songs, games, recipes, proverbs, and jokes

from among German-American relatives and friends. Obviously, the same may be done by a member of any other ethnic or racial group. Among groups my students have collected lore about are Texas Aggies, the "buffalo" soldiers at Fort McKavett, six- and seven-year-old children, Girl Scouts, Blacks, Mexican-Americans, and several others. The only limitation here is that ethnic lore may be collected only by members of the ethnic group.

On the other hand, students may collect one type or genre of lore from a variety of sources, so long as they collect it personally from people they know. Most of the papers my students do are of this type. They have collected quilt patterns, graveyard epitaphs, bumper stickers, courtship customs of an earlier day, graffiti, fraternity songs, string games, riddles, proverbs, fetishes, remedies, and so forth.

The students usually need about two weeks to complete the collecting phase, depending of course upon how much material I expect them to collect. Then each student gives an oral report. By this time, many of them will have caught fire, and their ingenuity in presenting their materials is amazing. For example, one young woman collected graffiti, and she made three big posters, each featuring the top of a toilet tank. The "walls" surrounding the tank top were, of course, filled with authentically reproduced copies of the graffiti she had found. This method of presentation enabled her to include the pictures and other details difficult to represent fully in words. A young man video-taped gestures he observed in the Ram Room, the students' gathering place on our campus; and then he played his video tape to illustrate his project for us. Another young woman tape recorded traditional music by a Western band, and then brought the band to class to perform in person. A second young man brought samples of treasure he and his friends had found through the years to illustrate his collection of treasure yarns.

It is usually necessary to limit the time for oral reports, but it is important to allow enough time for the spontaneous response of other members of the class. Many of them are reminded of things they are eager to share with the group, and usually the class will have begun by this time to think of themselves as a group sharing something significant and fun.

I insist on specific and detailed outlines that I check over before the oral reports. Thus, I can slip in a bit of instruction on unity, structure, and methods of development; and I'm also sure that a great deal of class time is not wasted with thrown together, rambling, pointless material.

After the oral reports, the students write thesis-centered reports about their projects. In these themes they develop whatever comments, observations, and conclusions they wish to make. This summary-report is the major theme of the project. But they also evaluate one or more of their classmates' oral reports in another well organized, fully developed theme. And sometimes they evaluate the entire project in a similar manner.

Another activity students enjoy is mimeographing and distributing copies of the gathered lore. Eliot Wigginton, a secondary English teacher in the Appa-

lachian region of northern Georgia, surely one of the most difficult places in the country for an English teacher to function successfully, tried a folklore project when he found his students unresponsive to traditional approaches; and now his students periodically publish selections of their collected lore. The best pieces have come out in three well received books entitled *The Foxfire Books, I, II, and III*.

Another activity that can readily grow from these collections is a library research paper. In fact, as a fresh approach to the research paper, folklore seems especially promising, I think.

Why do you teach the research paper? First, probably, you hope that the students will learn how to use library materials, especially the periodicals and their indexes, perhaps. Since many libraries are somewhat limited, you may have *The Reader's Guide* and no other indexes. And you probably get a number of popular periodicals, but you may get few or none of the literary journals.

So, your students will have a far more satisfying experience looking for material on topics that the popular magazines treat often, and most folklore-related topics are that sort. Further, your students are likely to discover a new excitement in reading about topics they now know something about from personal experience and field research.

Another skill you probably hope to encourage through the research paper is the ability to assimilate masses of material from myriad sources into a meaningful, cohesive composition. Appendix II offers some organizing approaches, at least one of which will, I believe, exercise effective control over any folklore-related topic. A big advantage I have found in requiring field research as well as library research is that the students cannot simply copy a block of material from Encyclopedia A, and another from Source B, and then another from Encyclopedia C until they have arrived at the required number of sources. They must find their own words in order to report the original findings from their folk sources.

Of course, you can teach documentation procedures for library materials in the usual manner, but since documenting field sources is entirely different, you have an opportunity to help the students understand the reasons for documenting their work. Students can evolve individual systems if you want to force them really to think about the matter. Or you can prescribe a uniform procedure if that approach seems better suited to their needs.

The primary purpose of the folklore unit in my freshman comp class is, of course, to help the students learn to write better themes. But I have observed valuable by-products that seem worth mentioning, too.

First, many of the students exhibit a new awareness of the folk motifs that permeate literature. For example, take a boy who has discovered that, say, both the county judge and the principal of his school, if they happen to spill some salt, will throw a few grains over their left shoulder to ward off the bad luck. Such a boy is likely to read *Huck Finn* with greater sensitivity for understanding superstitions exactly like Huck's are still very much alive today.

If you include the original folklore unit early in the course, you can have follow-up work later in connection with various literary works. For instance, if someone has collected proverbs, analyzing Shakespeare's artistic use of such wise sayings becomes far more meaningful. And Hamlet is certain to seem less comic and more tragic as a hero to senior boys who realize that they actually know people who do believe in ghosts, even today. The study of the early English ballads takes on added significance, too, after students have collected fraternity or Girl Scout songs. Likewise, students are amazed after collecting fifty or so current riddles to find that people in Beowulf's day and Samson's, too, loved riddles, that these verbal puzzles are one of the most ancient literary forms, and that they are actually primitive metaphors. In fact, I've found no better way to get into explaining metaphors and metaphorical concepts than through the easily opened door of riddles.

A problem often encountered in teaching older literature is that it seems unreal and outdated to students. They often have difficulty finding anything in common between, say, Odysseus' day and the twentieth century. Folklore can help a great deal in bridging that time gap. Not only can students discover beliefs in ghosts and in preventive rituals like Huck Finn's among people they know; they can also be led to see that Homer and Faulkner, not to mention a multitude of writers in between, used some of the same themes and motifs in their work. And the reason they did so, obviously, is that all human beings have a great deal in common, even though they may happen to live more than 2500 years apart in time.

In addition to the enrichment of their study of literature, a second valuable by-product of folklore study is that many students reach a more mature understanding and acceptance of their own and others' racial, ethnic, or other folk-group identities. A Mexican-American boy in my class a couple of years ago collected tales told by an aged shearing *capitán* for whom he had worked. I think that all of us who heard his report came to a new appreciation of the humor and warmth revealed through those folktales, and I think the student himself came to a higher sense of self-respect and ethnic pride in its best sense.

A third benefit is that the generation gap almost disappears in the attitude of a number of students because of their collecting projects. One young man did a report on his father's occupation—hand-making custom-ordered boots. By the time he had finished the project, this student had progressed from feeling a bit ashamed of his father's work to feeling intense pride in it. He was stricken with the realization that such handwork is vanishing with his father's generation, and he had come to a much higher respect and admiration for the pride in his work exhibited by the true artisan. A girl interviewed her grandparents and their friends, collecting earlier courtship customs. She was amazed at the pleasure it gave those people to relive the days of their youth and to think that she was actually interested in hearing about their good times of long ago. She came away from her project convinced that young people

enjoyed life, fellowship, and courtship even more before they had TV, cars, and discotheques than they do now.

All these results of the folklore project are rewarding—students find that they are creative and that they do have something to write about; their study of literature becomes more meaningful; they learn a new respect and admiration for each other and for themselves; they develop a new feeling of kinship with other generations and a new respect for old values. But best of all, from my point of view at least, I collect themes that are varied in content and for the most part intrinsically interesting to read. □

Appendix I

Random Ideas for Some Collecting Projects

Desk-top inscriptions	Beliefs about the moon
Chain letters	Tattoos
Mnemonic (memory) devices	Cattle brands
Fetishes	CB radio lore
Treasure legends	Flyleaf rhymes
Animal legends	Yearbook autographs
Aggie jokes	Omens
Knock-knocks	Work songs
Tall tales	Beauty recipes
Local character anecdotes	Fiddle tunes
Pregnancy lore	Quilt patterns
Taboos	Girl Scout lore
Nursing lore	School trip songs
Recipes	Kissing games
Water-witching	Lovers' lane stories
Mule stories	String games
Hunting yarns	Tombstone epitaphs
Fish stories	Riddles
Jump-rope rhymes	Needlecraft patterns
Graffiti	Funeral and death lore
Proverbs	Ghost stories
Sports lore	Dumb athlete stories
Livestock lore	Rodeo lore
Weather lore	Bumper stickers
Telephone gags	Dating lore

Appendix II

Writing About Folklore

Interesting though collecting folklore is to students, they still must transform their collected data into unified compositions that develop meaningful theses. The easiest way to accomplish this transformation probably is to organize the raw materials around one or more of the following questions, answers to which may be thought of as the basic goal of any research in folklore: *Definition* (what folklore is); *Classification* (what the genres of folklore are); *Source* (who "the folk" are); *Origin* (who composed folklore); *Transmission* (how folklore is carried, how fast, and how far); *Variation* (how folklore changes and for what reasons); *Structure* (what the underlying form of folklore is and the relation of form to content); *Meaning* (what folklore means to its carriers); *Function* (how folklore serves its carriers); *Use and application* (what should be done with folklore and in what other areas of study it is useful).²

Notes

¹ Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore, an Introduction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), p. 5.

² Brunvand, pp. 10-11.

• Peggy Skaggs teaches English at Angelo State University.

FEAR OF FAILURE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

cause and effect

Elizabeth Carros Keroack

John Holt, in his widely-read classic *How Children Fail*, characterizes the business of school as follows—

Each task is an end in itself. The children don't care how they dispose of it. If they can get it out of the way by doing it, they will do it; if experience has taught them that this does not work very well, they will turn to other means . . .

Students' fear of failure, then, greatly affects assignment giving and doing in the classroom. How students behave when they do not know what to do often determines their success and/or failure in school; while some are self-assured enough to tolerate the uncertainty of problem-solving and make it work for them, many find such anxiety insufferable and experience defeat because of it.

This kind of pressure is not difficult to understand, for adults as well as children labor under it almost every day of their lives. Sometimes the pressure is externally imposed, perhaps by a situation which demands more of us than we are practically able to give, while at others it is inflicted upon us by our alter-egos, tough critics molded by years of subjugation to the standards of others. Whatever the cause, the fear of failure which fills minds and hearts results in a damaging tension that translates good intentions into less than adequate results.

The writing teacher confronts students' fear of failure from the very first minutes in the classroom. Those who have been long convinced of the mystery and hardship of written communication are not easily cajoled into renewed efforts, particularly if they are to be efforts of spirit rather than rote. Students view the writing assignment (which often constitutes the text of a process-oriented writing class) as merely "something to get done." As the last word of a piece is put into place, the assignment becomes non-tension reducing and therefore infinitely forgettable. This attitude may be furthered by the disagreeableness of the proposed work, as not every student feels he has ideas of value to communicate, but more often it is simply an outgrowth of the feeling permeating our society that product is worth more than process. How can the writing teacher stimulate students to immerse themselves in the discovery process that characterizes writing?

All would-be writers' first encounter with blank paper is frightening, regardless of the nature of the assignment. As time passes and the dearth of black on white grows uncomfortable to bear, students complain about the difficulty of harnessing ideas. Their problem does not result from a lack of ideas, but rather from an anxiety about the assignment that

"... is related to the gap between the ideal vision . . . and the objective results" (Rollo May, *The Courage to Create*). Will their words convey all that they intend? If students believe otherwise, they will exert only a minimum amount of effort directed toward completion of the task, for such effort insures their failure without the pain of hard work. Within the writing classroom, procrastination constitutes a major drawback to students' experience of success; if nothing is written, many potential discoveries will lie fallow.

Procrastination is really no more than the insecurity of not having an answer, right or wrong, to a question or problem, and like many writing blocks, it can be overcome by the writing teacher who exercises patience and ingenuity. The introduction into the classroom of a number of different prewriting activities, that is, those activities which precede the actual commitment of words to paper, can often induce hesitant writers to embrace seemingly vague thoughts and feelings and transform them into realities. For example, an "idea inventory" or checklist of one hundred or more possible activities, subjects, and experiences generates amongst students enthusiastic conversation and exchanges of confidence that bring them to the realization that they do indeed know their world well enough to write about it. Brainstorming ideas for topics serves much the purpose. Assignments which have no predetermined content or form (free writing) also may cajole those who are reluctant to write about vicarious experience into treating interesting facets of their own existence. Because the degree of involvement in the subjects they choose for themselves will be more intense than that exercised in random assignments, the writing they do may change their self-world relationship from one of stasis to one of exploration. In this way, assignments reflect the students' experiences outside of school as they relate to the body of knowledge learned within the confines of the classroom.

Another means of helping students ease themselves into the writing process is the establishment of firm deadlines for their work. These deadlines may at first generate some unease, as students feel forced to complete assignments in a specified length of time; but deadlines may more importantly serve to reduce the discomfort that results when writers are not self-disciplined enough to produce material without the assistance of limitations. In its own way, creativity necessitates such limitations because it grows out of the very anxiety that exists between complete spontaneity and restriction.

Although students who procrastinate are a frequent problem in the writing classroom, those who

rapidly and carelessly dispatch every assignment in order to "get it out of the way" are a more prevalent and difficult problem. Students rushing through the course work heedless of its value are unwittingly caught up in a bad habit. Because laboring under a fear of failure is far more distressing than doing something about it, these fledgling writers often plunge themselves into the chaos of their ideas for the primary purpose of dispelling that fear through action; they do not consciously attempt, however, to put their ideas into any comprehensible and/or meaningful form. For the writing teacher who is concerned with students' exploration of process, this behavior echoes faintly of panic and flight. Somehow, a process orientation must be brought to bear upon writing instruction.

One means of achieving this end is through the exercise of flexibility in grading, which works to deemphasize product. For example, not every assignment need be evaluated; students may choose at the end of the semester which completed assignments best demonstrate their skills. Similarly, an accentuation of the drafting process, the consistent reworking of a piece of writing, commits students to the ongoing improvement of their creative efforts. Continued opportunities for revision in a

workshop setting permit writers to work out the problems they encounter one painstaking step at a time, thereby increasing their knowledge of process and the success it can promote.

But ultimately, convincing students of the joy and value inherent in the experience of writing is best accomplished by paralleling it to other process-oriented activities with which they are familiar—playing sports, doing chores, building models, and growing up are just a few of them. Class discussion of the similarities of these activities brings forth the realization that very little in life is finite, for there is always another game to play, another chore to do, another model to build, and another direction in which to develop. Likewise, writing is a persistent effort to grow through communication.

In any medium, the creative process is an urge to make sense of the world at large, to struggle against disintegration toward harmony. Writing is just one vehicle for achieving this harmony, but it is a viable one for those students who can conquer the fear of failure in order to embrace the joy of discovery. □

• Elizabeth Carros Keroack teaches English in Stoneham, Massachusetts.

A TOUCH OF CLASS: prerequisite for the writers' workshop

Jean Moore

Having conducted a one-semester college course in creative writing for many years, I have, like most instructors, developed a number of techniques to foster and encourage student writing ability. Several of these procedures have evolved spontaneously in the class over the years, as student-needs arose.

The course is conducted as a workshop, with student-criticism and discussion of all manuscript; written for credit. Each member of the class writes one play and two short stories during the semester, but the most important part of the course takes place before this long work is due. It is the crucial first few weeks' assignments, therefore, that I will discuss in this essay.

Bring it with you.

Authors of books for would-be writers never tire of explaining why it is impossible to teach anyone how to write creatively. The touch of class, variously dubbed artistry, inborn talent, creativity, the writer's Eye or Ear, the total sum of the individual's experiences cannot be taught. In the words of the song, "You've got to bring it with you when you come."

I would like to explain why I call this elusive quality "class," why only a touch of it is required for enrollment in the course, and why the job of the writing in-

structor is justified by two main functions: first, diagnosis, and second, instruction in control. At the beginning of a college-level writers' workshop the immediate problem of the professor is to diagnose the students' strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps no potential ability is evidenced in the first assignments; possibly students, thinking they were signing up for a composition course, are unable to control sentences or paragraphs effectively; or perhaps their first efforts show total lack of imagination. Students with these drawbacks are advised to drop the course during the first week. Criticism in the workshop itself is freely and impersonally offered as writers are not identified while I read their work to the group.

In the first class students are asked to produce a piece of spontaneous writing which might be composing a letter to the wall, describing how a car feels when it is running out of gas, or commenting on a large X drawn on the blackboard. The possibilities of the latter are almost endless—X marks the spot, X brand, X rated, X symbolizing a kiss, and much more.

Strengths such as imaginative description, and fast-paced action which appear in the student-writers' first assignments, are identified in conference with the instructor. Common weaknesses are verbosity, inadequate characterization or development of theme, and lack of control of symbols, but

the most persistent weakness seems to be dialogue that lies down on the page and dies. This problem may be overcome by avoiding dialogue altogether, by use of a tape recorder to aid in producing more natural dialogue, or by collaborating with another writer who does not share this difficulty.

Say "EE!"

The diagnosis covers several weeks before longer works are expected of students and consists of daily assignments each of which contains a hidden trap or a writing obstacle to be overcome. Anybody can say "ah" when the doctor applies that tongue-depressor and peers down the throat, but recently a throat specialist surprised me by unexpectedly requesting, "Say 'ee'," which is much more difficult. (Try it.) That is the type of trap built into each of the early short assignments, the expected changed to something much more difficult. It is not necessary for writers to recognize the specific nature of the obstacle, for they may carefully complete the assignment according to directions, overcome the difficulties as they encounter them, and thus unconsciously meet the challenge and avoid the trap; however, they have been guided by the nature of the task into using the necessary techniques, as they discover during the subsequent workshop discussions. Several of the booby-trapped assignments are described in the following paragraphs with some explanation as to ways writers may meet these problems and how this aids in my diagnosis of their potential.

Vague, vaguer, vaguest . . .

Because students love to be vague and abstract, obscure and ambiguous in their writing, one early assignment is designed to foster careful, concrete detail. For a model, we use the passage from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* in which Billy Pilgrim watches a war movie backwards.¹ The trap here is that to tell any incident backwards, the writers must first meticulously arrange the details forwards, and then reverse them. Their efforts have run the gamut from straight description of an event told backwards to more complicated relationships. Incidents narrated might be a snowfall, a dog being fed, or a rock festival. One astounding² detailed report that was handed in traced the making of synthetic cloth from the finished garment backwards through no less than nineteen stages to the final "coal-swamp forests formed over two and one half billion years ago in the proterozoic age . . ." The end dots are the writer's, pointing backwards through dizzying eons of time.

One careless or hurried young man's attempt to narrate a car wreck in reverse was glaringly lacking in necessary detail. Workshop members commented that the unidentified writer had obviously not engaged his mind in the assignment beyond obtaining the original situation from a TV automobile-safety film. However, brainstorming the various possible approaches to a given idea often proves beneficial, as this type of criticism leads to keener self-criticism on the part of all the members when they are writing the next piece of work. While the group

worked over the wreck scene in discussion, one came up with the suggestion that the story should begin by having two ambulances speed backwards to the wrecked cars and the attendants throw out several bodies onto the road—certainly an original opening for any paragraph.

A complex approach was evidenced by one writer who began the assignment by describing an unnamed man's feelings concerning his wife's becoming increasingly cold towards him, and ended with the lines: "He settled on a tall stool and turned slowly to face her stony image. With an indifference he never knew his sensitive artistic soul could muster, Pygmalion said, 'Galatea, it's all over between us.'"

DeJoyce. (or: "hope dazedizzy no oh surely wouldshe yes i")

While on the point of student susceptibility to the abstract-vague syndrome, I should mention that the pitfalls of pseudo-stream-of-consciousness writing are many for would-be writers of sense, that is, writers of would-be sense. In an upper-level literature course on this style or method, they have "re-Joyced" in the fine freedom that appears to accompany total lack of punctuation. Scribbling on with abandon, they let it all hang out in disjointed fragments, dashes, dots, and half-finished phrases, not to mention confusing so-called compounds; but they totally disregard the strict control by syntax and associations exercised by Joyce, for example, in the Penelope episode of *Ulysses*, or by Faulkner at the end of the Quentin section in *The Sound and the Fury*. These are invisible methods that are easy to ignore, because it all looks so simple to do, but I stress that this free-flowing stream is mainly a visual effect. The suggestion that such a seemingly loose style is not being handled "correctly" outrages workshop members in general. Beginners fall in love with each paragraph they produce and fight to keep it pure, i.e., how it was churned out on the first inspired try, and this goes double for writers trying to reproduce their unchained minds on paper. I suggest that students keep the first drafts and retype them with punctuation and standard sentence structure, to see how they hold up so far as sense is concerned, and then hand in the second drafts. If I never see a second attempt I know that the post-pseudo-Joycean has retreated into an ivory tower (on Sandymount Strand?) retaining the individuality of an unconscious mind against efforts to de-Joyce it.

The humanity of the toilet . . .

An additional assignment designed to overcome pointlessly vague writing is the description of a human process or emotion. While definite statements must be made by individual writers, they cannot name their topics. The trap is that while writers still have to resist meaningless vagueness, they are required to be somewhat ambiguous by the very nature of the task, even though at the end of the assignment every apparently vague detail must be justified. A typical example I have received from students is apprehension, as revealed through a char-

acter who was digging in the dark of a damp night. (It was left unstated whether that character was burying something or digging it up, but an atmosphere of tension pervaded the entire action.) Another writer described sensations of nausea in a concert hall until the character fled the theatre for the rest room. The following excerpt from another assignment illustrates this method:

She had never imagined such terror and pain, and her anguished screams continued until she slipped into unconsciousness. She awakened to find herself on her back, unable to turn over. She had been so agile before, so free; now she felt as if a great weight were crushing her to the bed. . . . She could not rid herself of the feeling that something vital was missing, forever lost, but she could not remember what it was.

The student was describing birth from the baby's point of view, this passage referring to the hour after birth and the weight mentioned being gravity.

Another young woman described being totally alone at night in a dormitory during a fierce thunderstorm. In her frightened state, she suddenly heard the flushing of a toilet and was comforted. In workshop discussion we agreed that this detail was the perfect choice. The world is divided, in fact, into two classes of creatures, those who flush toilets and those who cannot. Since only humans do this, and threatening persons would hardly announce their presence with deliberate noise, the selection of this touch was exactly right for the purpose of establishing reassurance for the main character. It is for such originality of specific detail that the members of the workshop consciously strive.

Say. Can you see?

Many amateur writers, being human, want to be different. It is difficult to urge them to crawl before walking, much less sprinting, so for our only texts in the course we read a writers' writer, John Barth. He demonstrates inescapably that he had earned the right to be different, and most of the group enjoy his style immensely. Even in a one-semester course, some more able students do win this right, at least to a small extent, but most do come to realize that before attempting something as innovative as Heller's *Catch 22* it is necessary to steer through the other twenty-one catches, or traps.

Use of professional works as models proves beneficial for the next booby-trapped assignment, which is to describe a stage of life, or a state of being which most humans experience. One example used to make the assignment intelligible is William Faulkner's comment on old age at the end of "A Rose for Emily."² The writers in the workshop are urged to create such comparisons in their work, in order to make the writing visually vivid. A somewhat different example is John Knowles' description of all sixteen-year-olds' attitude to their age, from *A Separate Peace*.³ The achievement here is originality of idea. Students deal with such states as falling in love, tak-

ing examinations, being a woman or a man, or reaching the age of nineteen.

This leads directly into the next diagnostic obstacle, the attempt to produce visually vivid prose by use of metaphor and simile. Assuring the writers that everything in the universe can be compared to something else, I instruct half of the class to turn their backs to the chalkboard and the other half to sit facing them as partners. The first are presumed to be blind and have to rely on their partners to describe to them, as vividly as possible in 10 minutes, a picture which I place at the chalkboard. At first this activity seems high-schoolish to them, but those who can "see" are required to use at least three apt comparisons while their blind partners may ask questions and make notes or sketches if they wish. Somewhat abstract paintings are the most useful, preferably amateur work that no student could have seen before. Comparisons are used to make abstract shapes visual, such as, "It is Daliesque in structure," or "This section of the picture is shaped like the rings in a Ballantine beer ad," or "The background resembles the Milky Way." After discussion of the picture, which the entire class now views, and of the similes employed, the partners swap places and the process is repeated with a different picture. By this second attempt the class is consciously striving for fresh, original similes.

Although the diagnostic process is still continuing at this stage of the semester's work, a few of the first long assignments, which I will explain later, are now coming in to the workshop. Sometimes, to foster continued use of similes, I assign the hunting of apt comparisons in the works they are reading for other courses, especially in literature, and we watch for this method in student work. Examples of a few of the similes that have impressed them as making their reading come alive are "Then suddenly, as a train comes out of a tunnel, the airplane rushed out of the clouds again," from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*; "The man was a relic from another age like the 1 letter in the neon sign that is off the blink," from Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*; a girl's eyes with "lashes like two sets of military shoe brushes," from Tom Wolfe's *The Pump House Gang*; a man who has totally lost control of the situation and is experiencing panic is described as having "the sensation of driving a car without brakes," in Flannery O'Connor's "The Lame Shall Enter First," and "'Aschenbach has always lived like this'—here the speaker closed the fingers of his left hand to a fist—'never like this'—and he let his open hand hang relaxed from the back of the chair," from Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, to name just a sampling. This exercise leads the students to be more careful writers and also more appreciative readers.

The simile shaker (or: I mean like how not to ruin a gourmet meal).

While good writing reveals frequent use of the simile, it creates two pitfalls for the unwary. The Simile Shaker is first cousin of the English 101 Comma Sprinkler who looks aghast at the punctuation-free theme just ground out and applies an ample

sprinkling of commas indiscriminately. The Simile Shaker makes one comparison per line with mathematical precision, and drives the workshop members crazy. Of course, the problem here is adequate control, which in the final analysis is the basic purpose of a creative writing course.

The second pitfall is simply grammatical, the use of *like* in the place of *as*. While "I felt like a million bucks" is a simile, cliché though it may be, "I felt like I was going to throw up" does not make a comparison. Somehow it is much easier to say, "It's like I mean, you know," than to say precisely what it is like, so that the reader does know, to make the comparisons for which we strive in the workshop.

The sound barrier . . .

Everybody loves a puzzle, especially when we know the answer and nobody else does, and so we write one, but along with the fun is that fiendish trap again. The challenge in this assignment is to give equal attention to content and form. Using as a model John Barth's "Glossalalia" from *Lost in the Fun House*, each student writes a short piece in the exact rhythm of some well-known recitation. This could be the Lord's Prayer used by Barth, or the Boy Scout's Promise, the Pledge to the Flag, the Apostles' Creed, or any other recitation which the writer can assume the workshop members will know. Slogans are not practical, being too short and choppy in construction, and nursery rhymes such as "Mary Had a Little Lamb" make for a sing-song result in the work. One writer who became carried away by the challenge of matching syllables wrote a description of a sunset using the entire Gettysburg Address for a model. That assignment began:

Come watch the morning sun begin to color
Four score and seven years ago our fathers

All the earth with heavenly hues . . .
brought forth on this continent a . . .

and ended:

. . . That is properly night's chrome. Silly night.
. . . and that government of the people, by

You surely must have sometime heard God's
the people, for the people, shall not

order: Let light be!
perish from the earth.

I believe this was the longest effort ever received in our workshops. Many times, students will find that they have achieved either sense or rhythm; to produce both is quite difficult, but they try for both.

Another writer made a tape-recording using as a model, the Apostles' Creed, and played it in conjunction with a reading of the completed assignment, which was in the form of a wife's letter to the husband who had deserted her. (Occasionally writers prefer for some particular reason to read their own work to the group, and is thus not anonymous.) This student had matched the rhythm perfectly, the whole purpose of this assignment be-

ing to make the writers conscious of syllables as well as of words as they express their ideas. Often the struggle to find a suitable word of, say, four syllables, in the context of what is being written, will lead the writer to an entirely new idea, in the same way that rhyme may when one is writing poetry. For instance, the letter just mentioned described the husband as being Italian. This choice was made originally simply because the writer needed a nationality of four syllables. The student was then led to a whole new theme, that the man had deserted his wife to seek fame in Hollywood, where at that time there was a glut of good-looking Italian actors.

Suffering loves company

Many professional writers have had to create their works under the worst of conditions, and at the very least under varied circumstances. For this reason, my writers have to produce their shorter pieces (during the diagnostic period) under a number of different conditions, such as when tired, on arising in the morning, in a hot or a cold place, inside the campus chapel, in the noisy cafeteria, and so on. This rapidly weeds out the writer who is inspired to compose only when the leaves turn red and gold or when the first crocus appears, or who sits typing frantically because the Muse struck at 3 a.m. (Of course, there is nothing wrong with being this type of writer, but if students use this as the sole *modus operandi* they do not belong in a workshop for creative writers.) Inevitably, a student once attempted to complete an assignment while under the influence of several beers too many, but creatively the experiment was not a success.

You were there (but who will care?)

The next workshop trap deals with how not to tell it like it is, but instead to show it, i.e., to dramatize the story rather than to narrate it. Because many beginners must be persuaded not to produce straight narrative without dialogue, our first long assignment is to write a one-act play. Here the stage itself is one obstacle that must be kept in mind at all times. Examples of some staging difficulties are that usually only one setting may be used; animals and birds cannot be relied on to play complicated parts on cue; and lighting, space available and sound effects must also be considered. Because of these problems, some students elect to write a short TV film instead. Unfortunately for them, I require a shooting script, the writing of which involves wrestling with other obstacles, such as camera-angles, length of shots, position of photographer, use of background music, montages, and so on. I always hope they will all decide to write the play instead, as no amateur film-writer in my workshop has yet escaped falling in love with the zoom shot.

In addition, since many writers like to use their own experiences for material, I have to warn them not to tell it like it was. I send them to Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" for his theory of how to fic-

tionalize real-life occurrences, and I refer them to his *The Aspern Papers* and *Spoils of Poynton* as effective examples of this method. I stress that actual events should be reshaped, turned into what should have happened artistically rather than what did; that life is not organized but fiction must be; that experiences should be made universal rather than left as particulars; and then I keep my fingers crossed. It is a great temptation to a student to feel free to defend any writing weakness to the workshop by saying, "But it really did happen that way."

The dappy ending

As is done in all creative writing courses, we attempt to produce visually vivid description, natural dialogue, arresting openings, and effective endings to our stories and plays. The fact that the endings of so many novels and plays have been altered for film viewers' consumption makes for ready examples to consider. After reading Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, for instance, do we really want the play, as in the early film version, to have a happy ending? Should Laura step totally out of character and, with sudden hidden strength, urge her brother to depart and lead his own life? Where in Williams' play does she reveal one sign that she even knows he has a life? Artistically, the original realistic ending holds up as *right*.

The most glaring example I know of this movie-making tampering with the endings of works of art is shown in the filmed version of *The Bad Seed*, by William March. Instead of the sinister finality of the novel's ironic ending line, "You still have Rhoda to be thankful for," and instead of the reader's horror on grasping that evil will still stalk the unsuspecting and trusting, what does the movie provide? Not only does the mother "recover" from her suicide, so that she is present to explain all, but also little mackintoshed Rhoda trots out to the pier in a midnight thunderstorm. She is intent on retrieving the medal her mother threw into the lake to cover up the murder Rhoda had committed to obtain this coveted treasure. And lo (accompanied by suitable crashes) a streak of lightning, like the finger of God, strikes from the just heavens and Rhoda goes poof! The audience is happy, of course, except for the viewers who have read the book, but I ask my workshop to consider which ending provides any insight into reality? Which respects the reader's intelligence, and which insults it? (The risk here is that we can expect a deluge of super-naturalistic doom-ridden themes in the next few plays or stories handed in, with Evil and Good in pitched battle.)

That's real class.

Eventually we find ourselves ready to discuss the nature of art from the writer's point of view, the equally important two-fold acts in the creative process that consist of conceiving the initial idea and deciding what to do with it, i.e., what method to employ. My own writing professors, Randall Jarrell and Peter Taylor, both insisted that at some point in the creation, the story "takes over and writes itself," but

this does not mean that the work has ended, rather that it is just beginning. The use of the unconscious mind in creativity is not a facile thing, for it must be "programmed" first. This is where the work comes in. For the pieces to fall into place as the writer dozes or contemplates obviously indicates that there were pieces to begin with.

For use in a creative writing class I cannot cite a better example of the two-fold nature of art, the idea and the method, than Conrad Aiken's short story, "Silent Snow, Secret Snow." With nothing but a short account of the mental illness of a young boy as his inspiration,⁴ Aiken had first to select a point of view, and he very rightly chose the boy's. He now had two problems: first, how to indicate that Paul was withdrawing from the world, and second, how to record the progression of the illness. Since the boy enjoyed his withdrawal, and since snow delights all children, Aiken invented the secret snow that would "shield" the boy from the outside world. Who can tell how the author arrived at this stroke of genius? He then created a postman who walked down the street daily in the "snow" so that the diminishing noise made by this man delivering letters and knocking on doors would signal the boy that his secret world was closing in on him daily. Paul listened each morning to discover that the increasingly muffled sounds of the mail being delivered were getting fainter, until the postman was at his very house. Not only was the delivery of mail a daily event on the boy's street, and thus suitable to signify the progressive stages of Paul's illness, but also there is the added significance of the fact that letters came from the rest of the world to Paul's little neighborhood. The selection of a point of view, the use of snow to signify mental illness, and a postman's walk to measure the progression of the boy's withdrawal—that shows real class!

Another useful example of "classy" method is in D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox*. Unlike the analysis of Aiken's techniques, the emphasis in our discussion of this novella is on style. I have yet to encounter a reader who does not experience exultance when Henry kills Banford with the felled tree, even though the boy is not depicted as likeable and we know that this is a cold-blooded premeditated murder. The answer to this enigma is that Lawrence has successfully maneuvered his reader into the position of seeing Banford not as a human being but as a selfish, snivelling obstacle to Henry's marriage; she *must* be removed. While Lawrence's style affords an admirable example, it is fortunately inimitable, for attempting to use his hypnotic repetitious technique as a model does not improve amateur writing. Lawrence's "touch" is not there.

While Aiken's story and Lawrence's novella exemplify creativity of method, the workshop also found that touch of class as related to the other part of the creative process, that is, the initial idea. One example that they discussed has been filmed recently, *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud*. Consider that when we contemplate the theory of reincarnation we tend to think always in terms of seventeenth or eighteenth centuries or earlier. Max Ehrlich, however, seems to have been able to envision, with one crea-

tive leap, the reincarnation of young Dr. Proud into a world in which his "former" wife and murderess still lives, and in which his daughter, a baby in his previous life, is still in her twenties. The students agreed that this type of imaginative perception shows real class, and I believe that a touch of it is definitely a prerequisite for a creative writing workshop. □

Notes

¹ Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Slaughterhouse Five* (Delacorte Press,

1967), p. 70.

² William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily," *The Best Short Stories of the Modern Age* (Fawcett, 1963), p. 225.

³ John Knowles, *A Separate Peace* (Dell, 1960), p. 46.

⁴ Conrad Aiken, "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," in *How Thinking Is Written*, Lawrence Sargent Hall, ed. (D. C. Heath, 1963), p. 286.

• Jean S. Moore is assistant professor of English at Belmont Abbey College in Belmont, North Carolina.

TEACHING EXPOSITORY WRITING with student interest stations

Jane M. Agee

Writing clear and accurate information and instructions is a complex task. One must know the subject well, select pertinent facts for presentation, organize the information in a clear fashion, and present all of this in written form.

Equally complex is the teaching of this facet of expository writing. The teacher must motivate the student through some sort of meaningful experience to try to work through the composition problems outlined above.

In an effort to provide an interesting and helpful learning situation with this very useful aspect of expository writing, I decided to let my students create their own interest stations for others to use. The students were free to select content which dealt with their own interests. One of the major components of each station was background information on the chosen topic and instructions for the station's activity.

My instructions included both requirements and suggestions. I prepared a ditto for them outlining three possible formats for the interest stations: visual, audio, or game-centered.

The visual stations had to include visual materials such as magazine clippings, photographs, or original drawings. The activity for the center was to be based on some sort of original art work to be done by the participant. In addition, I suggested that part of the activity be an explanation or description of the art work.

The audio centers were based on cassette tapes. After, or while, listening to the tape, the participant would have an activity which dealt with material on the tape.

The game stations had to be designed for two to four players. The materials for games had to be sturdy, clearly marked, and enclosed in a shoe box or manila envelope. Game boards had to be hinged for folding.

Requisite for all three formats were a couple of pages of introductory information about the topic of the station. I encouraged the students to make this information clear and interesting. We looked at advertiser's techniques in giving information on a new product for examples.

Each format also required an instruction sheet for the activity or game. Instructions had to be arranged in a step-by-step sequence, preferably numbered or lettered. In addition they were to be prefaced with a purpose and an explanation. I suggested to students that they ask a friend or parent to read through the instructions to check their clarity.

My preparations for the interest stations were relatively simple. I borrowed long tables to display the stations and checked out ten cassette recorders from the county media center. Also, I asked several student teachers who were interning in the school to be on hand to help distribute and set up stations.

The response to the interest stations was tremendous. Students created stations on rock and classical music, history of horror movies, snow and water skiing, camping and backpacking, and games of every sort. During the six days of interest stations (staggered over a three-week period for six classes), individual students found stations that interested them. In spite of the games, cassette decks, and students all over the floor in the room and in the hall, there were no discipline problems and no excessive noise. They were intensely involved as creators and participants.

To reinforce the purpose of the stations, they were evaluated in two ways. First, they were evaluated by those who participated in the station. Each station had a blank evaluation sheet attached to the instructions. The participants put comments on this sheet about strengths and weaknesses they had discovered. Second, I gave a letter grade based on the originality, clarity, and organization.

In summary, I was very pleased. The students had an opportunity to put their writing into actual use and in doing so learned the value of well-written information and instructions. They also learned to discriminate between good and poorly written instructions (as evidenced in the student evaluations). Perhaps even more important, they experienced someone else's interests and shared their own in a creative way. □

• Jane M. Agee, former middle school language arts teacher, teaches freshman English at the University of Georgia.

THE VIEWER—THE READER

Marguerite McMurtrie Bean

Smacked by collaged visual blows from all aspects of media, youngsters of the Pepsi generation find few opportunities to translate and assimilate the single, juxtaposed image in a tranquil and personal way. Media, since the decline of radio, has done its best to assault the sensibilities. The assault, explored by McLuhan, and demonstrated in *Futura Shock* by Toffler, continues its enigmatic race into nonsense. Students request to see the film run backwards with more glee from the absurd movement than pleasure in the sequence and flow of the intended message.

Language arts teachers charged with the instruction of reading and writing must be asking how much media stimulation or amplification is necessary. They have all heard the axe that grinds, how television has reduced reading and writing effectiveness over the years. It's a handy axe to grab, and a compelling reason to cut off media until the notion is time tested by thorough research. However, "visual literacy" is a term that reaches for its definition in using media wisely.

Developed in classes of American studies and the humanities at White Mountains Regional High School, *The Viewer—The Reader* is a visual literacy model of instruction that works. The program develops expression of both visual and verbal language by exploring art elements that can be translated into verbal images from the visual experience. The instruction unit incorporates: viewing and reading a painting; viewing and reading literature; selecting visual illustrations, composing verbal images, writing short (and extended) verse and prose.

The major divisions of study with a nine-week time frame might be arranged as follows:

First week. Explore the use of art elements in appropriate paintings selected for basic shapes, color, line, shape, texture, tone. (If available, use *The Viewer—The Reader*, a slide explanation.)

Second and third weeks. Select and rate five main elements as illustrated in popular magazines. Allow two days minimum for discussion, arrangement, and display of each element, in addition to list making.

Fourth and fifth weeks. From student lists compile a master list of image objects. Allow two days for qualifying images and discussing tape feedback of each element.

Sixth and seventh weeks. Begin writing with short verbal overlays on visual illustrations. Extend activity with samples of suggested writing methods for portfolio.

Eighth and ninth weeks. Finish portfolio with "My Own Thing." Allow four/five days for the shared reading of each portfolio, noting metaphorical language.

Exploring Art Elements

Reading art visually is a more universal experience than reading symbols lineally, if we follow

McLuhan's thinking. This has been the learning experience with *The Viewer—The Reader*. A new viewer sees the elements or components of visual composition almost instantly. Language arts teachers know only too well how every new reader reads differently, if not reluctantly, according to how the symbols are decoded. Also known is the value of reading limited only to decoding. The word should be emotionally perceived by the reader and in the image-making activity of *The Viewer—The Reader* the opportunity is available for the reader to analyze the common emotional response of words and their images. As a result, reading climbs to a level of art in the eyes and mind of the imaginative reader, and the imagination becomes turned-on to sensory language, to those words that convey concrete images from the visual object world around us.

Looking at words visually gives the reader a sense of painting as the imagination works out the form and color, while looking at paintings gives the viewer a sense of composition. The elements of color, line, shape, tone, texture are quickly discernible, once defined and demonstrated in a few sample paintings. For a beginning exercise, the following examples are appealing, but other representational and abstract paintings can be used.

Color and its emotional effect are studied and discussed in "Still-Life with Goldfish," Matisse; "The Old Guitarist," Picasso; "Don Bartolome Sureda," Francisco de Goya.

Basic shapes are circular in "The Boating Party," Mary Cassatt; oval in "The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew"; triangular in "Boat off Deer Isle," John Marin; rectangular in "Three Musicians," Picasso. "Still-Life with Pastries," Bangin, is an excellent review of all the basic shapes.

Line is beautifully clear in "Souvenir of Montefontaine," Corot; "Horizontal Tree," Piet Mondrian.

Texture has two strong examples in "Women in Blue," Oscar Kokoschka; "An Afternoon at LaGrand Fatte," Seurat.

Tone is very dramatic in "Place D'Italie," de Chirico. A good illustration of composition, emphasizing the unity and diversity of color, line, shape, texture, tone, is "The Fortune Teller," Georges de la Tour.

After introducing the elements visually, the focus turns from the viewer to the reader. The reader "sees" the same elements in a story as the viewer sees in a painting.

Color. "He opened the volume and took from among its black-letter pages a rose, . . . though now the green leaves and crimson petals had assumed one brownish hue. . . ." ("Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," Nathaniel Hawthorne)

Line. "The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose . . ." ("The Open Boat," Stephen Crane)

Shape. "His appearance was singular. He was tall and thin . . . hollow cheeks and curiously high cheekbones . . ." ("Rain," W. Somerset Maugham)

Texture. "Great black rocks, emerging from melting

drifts, their craggy skins glistening like the backs of resurrected brontosaurus." ("Central Park," John Updike)

Tone. "An owl hooted, and she screamed . . . she stooped down, so as not to be seen by any prowling scamp, for the moon which was setting, shed a bright light over the field . . ." ("The Story of a Farm Girl," Guy de Maupassant)

In every painting there is a story and in every story there is painting with color, shape, line, texture and tone. Emphasizing this sense of composition, the instructor now guides the immersion of the new viewer-reader into a series of class activities to reinforce the elements both visually and verbally. The activities begin and end in visual structure, either seeing it or reading words that suggest color, shape, line, tone, texture. Students scan passages of good prose and poetry and select those images that convey the best visual impact. They test their selections with one another. "Does that strike you as color?" or "Can you see line or just shape?" The sharing of images is unsolicited, and most spontaneous, for there is a compulsion to check it out with another pair of eyes.

Charles Dickens in *Tale of Two Cities* is popular for shape and color. Line is more difficult to find, and several members of one class suggested that the "older" authors, Guy de Maupassant, Charles Dickens, Stephen Crane, use line more than the modern authors. *Dracula* by Bram Stoker has many entries for tone, as well as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Seeing visual structure is the immediate follow-up activity. Students search for pictures strongly illustrating one of the elements. Almost any picture model can be used for this fairly lengthy unit—paintings, student drawings, magazine illustrations, magazine advertisements. As the urge to compare is very communicative, classes might wish to spend time on selecting, weighing, and judging finalists out of entries from the entire class.

Discussion can explore how to collect material, how to discuss the impact of each selection, and where to go for the best pictures. Time-tested ads in the familiar magazines (*Time*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Day*, *Newsweek*) are popular and accessible. Advertisements particularly strong on shape and perspective are: Honda Civic—top view of car with all doors opened; Polaroid—six cameras from six different angles prominently show rectangular shape of camera, circle of lens, and square of view finder. True cigarettes—elongated and distorted view of rectangular pack emphasizes the cylindrical shape of cigarette urging the smoker to take it. (Cigarette ads, in general, use strong shape appeal to persuade the viewer.) Stews, pies, hot soups, and boiled dinners blend color, shape, and texture in a most appealing way. Creatively, students select the better visuals, arrange a board display, and attach verbal expressions that either echo the visual meaning, or compare the picture to some other similar experience.

List Making

As a companion activity to the final arrangements of the better visuals, students compile lists of all the

words they see as a concrete image of an element. For example, if the element is shape, five to seven basic shapes are displayed—circle, oval, cone, triangle, square, rectangle, cylinder. After studying each shape, viewers think of objects representing different shapes.

The objects are listed under headings labeled, for convenience, *direct/indirect/indefinite*. The *direct* heading deals with the abstract term. The *indirect* heading covers the concrete image or the object that indirectly translates meaning to the viewer, i.e., a door is rectangular. The *indefinite* heading covers a more vague and generalized image. Rug, for example, could be rectangular to one student's experience, and round to another student's experience; hence the object does not indirectly translate the same meaning to every student.

The distinction between *indirect* and *indefinite* varies with the level of experience of each class. Students in one class generally agreed that rectangular objects under the *indirect* heading must be of a fixed, standard size, such as a football field, a soccer field or a dressage ring. An object such as a door was considered *indefinite*, for though it is rectangular, it is not always the same size.

The following list of shape, primary colors, and texture represents part of a list compiled by a mixed ability group of sophomores and juniors. The list was a working one, primarily testing a consensus view of particular objects. For this class, shape objects under the *indirect* heading were of a fixed size (basketball, baseball). Objects under the *indefinite* heading were of one size or another (buttons, eyeglasses). Carefully distinguishing each object is not as important as the exercise of consciously raising the image in the mind's eye. The process, in other words, is more pertinent to image making, with the group interacting to visualize and discuss each object.

Shape

Direct: Circle; *Indirect:* Earth, moon, (base)ball, (basket)ball; *Indefinite:* Ball, face, hamburger bun.

Direct: Square; *Indirect:* Baseball base, boxing ring; *Indefinite:* Tile, checkerboard, handkerchief.

Direct: Cylinder; *Indirect:* None; *Indefinite:* Typewriter roll, cigarettes, stovepipes.

Direct: Cone; *Indirect:* Pyramid, megaphone, Hershey kisses; *Indefinite:* Dunce cap, steeple bell, sharpened pencil.

Direct: Rectangle; *Indirect:* Football field, dollar bill, (car) license plates; *Indefinite:* Book, brick, door.

Color

Direct: Blue; *Indirect:* Clear sky, bluebird, robin's egg, denim, blueberry; *Indefinite:* Ocean, aqua, sapphire, eyes.

Direct: Yellow; *Indirect:* Banana, sunshine, butter, summer squash; *Indefinite:* Flame, school bus, cheese.

Direct: Red; *Indirect:* Blood, tomato, stop light, beets; *Indefinite:* Apple, sunset, rose, radish.

Texture

Direct: Smooth; *Indirect:* Silk, velvet, polished marble; *Indefinite:* Road, glass, skin of animals.

Direct: Gritty abrasive; *Indirect:* Ajax, sandpaper, crumbs (bread crumbs), unshaven face; *Indefinite:* Oyster, peanut butter.

Direct: Creamy; *Indirect:* Butter, whipped cream, frosting, marshmallow fluff; *Indefinite:*

Reviewing and discussing every student list leads to a master list which grows with the imagination of the students. It is the single best exercise for building verbal images that convey concrete visual meaning, and later, the list becomes a language source for the concluding writing activity. Students might conduct the entire list-making activity.

Each class generates a new master list, and members of the class decide how to manage the list-making activity that is most suitable to the group. In one class, students may list words in an orderly around-the-room manner. Another class may prefer to watch the board list grow as they pop words out, wanting to add a word instantly when their imagination sees an image. What is lost in this method is hearing from an imaginative student who does not verbalize easily. Students who read easily and enjoy word play seem to bounce words out naturally as rapidly as they appear in the mind. The quiet youngster appears amused by so many images popping into place. The around-the-room method, though less spontaneous, gives the teacher an opportunity to regard and measure the perception of both the verbal and less verbal student.

Writing

The writing period is painstaking and delightful, with first drafts, rewriting, and typing of the final portfolios. It is the concluding activity, and it can be as flexible as the interest and ability of each young writer. Generally, writing assignments are compiled in a portfolio of two sections. The first section shows practice in the basic methods of clarification with samples of narration, description, explanation, and comparison. The second part of the portfolio is casually referred to as—"My Own Thing," and covers different forms of prose and verse that come naturally, and with feeling, to each writer.

The results are gratifying to student writers who see an increase of defined and more deliberate language in their writing. Most students using this method find they have something concrete to talk about. Above all, this approach to viewing-reading and writing involves a sensitive use of visual stimulation for a purposeful goal. A language arts teacher should find that writing in visual and verbal language fosters change, as well as appreciation, in the learner.

Three samples of student writing demonstrate this behavior. The first sample compares description at the beginning and end of the writing phase.

Of the student's car: this is a veical it is not a very big veical it is orange and black it has windows and white wheels the front of this veical is dented with rust on the dented part and light gray paint on front this also has a big fin-type spoiler on the roof and a black stripe down the side of it.

Of his mother: This person is very generous and does not care about herself just the welfare of others. She is always worrying about me and others in the family. When ever she can posibly help she will, even if it is outside the family. She is very honest and many people know this. I think she is really smart about certain things like facts and figures but when it comes to common sense she is not to clever. This

lady is forty-eight years old she is five two and has been ever sense she was sixteen, she has kind of a plump stomach but is the right weight for her age.

The second sample also comes from a student of low academic achievement who labored to spell correctly, punctuate, and to make images correspond to visual elements.

He lay there on the course sandy beach with a smooth dark tan which was ripened by the suns bright yellow rays.

He could look out at the light blue waves come rolling in so calmly, and sweep away the sand from the beach, and leave a soft smooth texture to the eye, and a course grainy feeling to the touch; then he'd watch the waves gently roll back into the sea.

As he looked up he could see the soft white sea gulls against dark blue skies as their back ground; they drifted by in such solitude, as though they were feathers drifting downward ever so slowly.

As he laid there in such stillness you could see by looking at the expression on his face that he had lost all contact with the outer world, and was in his own little dream land.

The last sample comes from a student of average academic achievement.

The Hulk

There he was, a man imprisoned in a super grotesque body, subjected to a change he never knew or wanted. Standing in a field during a radiation explosion, he began to change on the spot, until he was huge and green.

There he stood, his hair black as coal as though it had been oiled several times in the past. His eyes squinted as if the light was too much for him to bear. His mouth was small but unwilling to talk as if his snow white teeth were in his way. His neck hung low between his two bulging shoulders. His muscles were huge and he was strong enough to crush a mountain. His hands were big enough to cover a basketball in one hand. He breathed hard and his chest pounded with the excitement of his huge new body. His legs bulging with muscles enabled him to jump hundreds of miles into the air, and his huge body enabled him to be able to endure the fall from such a height that would kill any ordinary man. His feet were so huge they were ten times any ordinary man's feet. He is great and new! He is huge! He is the Hulk!!!

The overall behavioral change in the learner from *The Viewer—The Reader* literacy model is significant and varied, as well as rewarding to the teacher of composition.

- Paintings receive a "second look" appreciatively.
- Magazine ads receive a fresh look for sale appeal and persuasive visual technique.
- Good prose receives another look at how well the language conveys vivid impressions of character and locality.
- Imagination shapes metaphors on a conscious level.
- Vocabulary increases with a sense of what words best express.
- Writing becomes more controlled and precise, extended in better form, flow, and unity.
- Creative imagination is expressed in the composition of stories that are graphic, vivid, and toned. □

• Marguerite McMurtrie Bean is chairman of the department of English at White Mountains Regional High School, Whitefield, New Hampshire.

THE EFFECT OF FEEDBACK ON WRITING: research review and implications

Daniel R. Wolter

Walter J. Lamberg

Abstract

Feedback has been a problematic factor in research in instruction in writing. Experience and a reading of discussions on teaching suggest that teachers provide a wide and often conflicting variety of kinds of feedback. The value of much research has been reduced by a lack of control for, and clear description of, the feedback provided to subjects, and very few studies have compared the relative effects of particular aspects of feedback. In spite of the problems, a review of the research suggests strongly that a particular approach to feedback may be highly effective and merits further research: selective, task-related feedback, controlled by measurement instruments, and provided by students to themselves and to their peers.

Research in the teaching of writing has been contradictory in its findings and apparently of little aid to teachers. The authors of a major review of research, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer, (5), concluded that research has often been poorly designed or poorly described. A major difficulty noted has been the many variables that may affect students' writing. Braddock, Jones, and Schoer commented that

there are many variables to control in research with written composition. There are so many that it is an unusual study which does not leave several important variables uncontrolled or undescribed. (p. 55)

One variable which may be of great importance in instruction in writing is feedback, or information about a performance which influences future performance. It appears that, in studies of instruction, feedback is often a factor, but is rarely adequately described, defined, or controlled. This discussion has three purposes: (1) to identify possibly important aspects of feedback as it relates to writing; (2) to review research that has, to some extent, considered the effect of feedback; and (3) to suggest a direction for further research in feedback.

Aspects of Feedback

Feedback is generally defined as information about performance or as knowledge of results. Some theorists and researchers have narrowed the general definition somewhat. For example, Brethower (6) and Olds (19) have defined feedback in terms of its function: Feedback is not just any information on a performance, but information that has an effect on the performance; i.e., that maintains or modifies the performance. The effect may be one of reinforcement (e.g., it may maintain or increase the number of words written); or it may be one of extinction

(e.g., it may reduce or eliminate misspelled words.)

Olds and Brethower provide a helpful starting point; however, there remains much to consider. Writing is a complex performance; there are many behaviors to be affected. As an illustration of the complexity, one can speculate that any one instance of feedback might have both desirable and undesirable effects; e.g., information about number of spelling errors might reduce the number (a desirable effect) but, at the same time, might reduce the total number of words written (an undesirable effect).

A look at the ways any group of teachers responds to papers, or for that matter the ways any one teacher responds to one paper, suggests that students receive a variety of types and amounts of information under a variety of conditions. As a guide in examining research on feedback on writing, an identification of different types, amounts, and conditions is helpful.

Feedback may be categorized as relatively general information or relatively specific: "Underdeveloped" or "Poor Spelling" (general) as opposed to "You wrote only 200 words" or "8 misspellings" (specific). A similar way of categorizing feedback is in terms of abstract or concrete information. "Underdeveloped" is abstract; "8 misspellings" is concrete.

Feedback may be both abstract and general, e.g., "unacceptable grammar"; but it can also be abstract and (comparatively) specific; e.g., "This group of words is a fragment." To make the feedback both specific and concrete, the concept of "fragment" would have to be described or explained in concrete terms: "When they arrived is a fragment because it starts with a word like *when* and ends with a period."

Feedback also may be categorized as positive, negative, or corrective. Positive feedback informs the writer of what he has done successfully; it notes the presence of or describes desired behaviors: "192 words out of 200 are spelled correctly," or "Good work on spelling." Negative feedback does the opposite: "8 misspellings" or "Poor spelling." Corrective feedback, like negative, also notes the absence of a desired behavior but includes some sort of help or suggestion for correcting the problem. For example, instead of simply circling a misspelling, the teacher might write in the correct spelling, write out a rule for that spelling problem, or suggest a way of proofreading for spelling errors.

Finally, information can be categorized as task-related or task-unrelated. The former would be any information directly related to the elements of the task, or the desired qualities involved in doing the task successfully, as identified in the instructions and requirements for the writing assignment. For

example, the instructions for an essay might be: "Write a five-hundred word essay. Present one thesis, develop that thesis by breaking it down into at least three points, and support each point." Task-related feedback would note number of words, the presence or absence of a thesis, the number of points, perhaps the relationship of the points to the thesis, and the presence or absence of supporting statements. Task-unrelated feedback might note spelling, sentence structure, usage, or fine points of style.

Since writing involves many behaviors, the question of amount of feedback may be important. A teacher has at least three choices: (1) provide information on every possible aspect of writing on each assignment whether those aspects are task-related or not; (2) limit comments to aspects identified as basic elements of the task; or (3) limit feedback to one task-related element for each assignment.

A reading of discussions of teaching writing (as contrasted with research on writing) in journals and "methods" books suggests that much thought has been given to the particular conditions by which feedback is provided, irrespective of the content or type of feedback. Consideration has been given to the comparative benefits (1) of using editing symbols versus writing out comments, (2) of written comments versus spoken comments (via tape recorder or personal conference), and (3) of marginal versus terminal comments. Questions have been raised as to the use of the feedback by students: Should students have the opportunity to (or be required to) rewrite papers in light of the feedback? Should they compare papers over a period of time in light of feedback? Should these comparisons be made by keeping a folder of assignments, a checklist of errors, or a progress chart? Another condition considered is the timing of the feedback. Should students receive feedback immediately after completing an assignment and/or immediately before starting the next one? Or, will feedback delayed for days or weeks, while the teacher reads the papers, still be effective?

A final aspect of feedback, also given much consideration in discussions of the teaching of writing, has been the source of the information. Traditionally, the teacher has been the primary or sole source of responses to students' writing; recently many educators have argued in favor of peer feedback. A third alternative is self-provided feedback, whereby the students are given the means to record information about their own performance, e.g., with graphs or checklists.

Research on Feedback

A review of the research leads to two conclusions about what researchers have attempted so far. First, of the many aspects of feedback noted above, relatively few have been investigated. Second, except for a few studies, no attempts were made to control for and to compare the relative effects of particular aspects of feedback. No studies measured the effects of general versus specific feedback,

abstract versus concrete, task-related versus task-unrelated, immediate versus delayed, or feedback from all three sources—teacher, peer, and self-provided.

Three studies involving the use of negative feedback reported no significant changes (3, 7, 11). No comparison was made with positive feedback. In one of these studies, there was also an investigation of the effects of amount of feedback. One group received "moderate evaluation" (in which the errors marked were limited to particular skills students were studying); a second group received "intensive evaluation" (in which every error was marked); no significant differences were found (7, p. 28). The effect of selective feedback (information on only one skill) was not investigated.

Four studies (8, 13, 14, 24) compared positive and negative feedback. They reported that positive feedback resulted in more favorable attitudes toward writing than did negative feedback, but found no significant effect on quality of writing. Biberstine (4) reported that negative feedback had a negative effect on students' attitudes, and that positive comments lost value when surrounded by negative comments; no data on effect on writing quality was presented.

All the studies noted so far did not indicate whether or not the feedback was task-related. One study, by Wolter (25), which measured effects of different ways of providing task-related feedback, reported significant changes in writing by students who received positive feedback.

In the same study, Wolter (25) compared the effects of positive feedback with corrective feedback and with no feedback. The groups receiving positive feedback and corrective feedback both showed significant gains. Schroeder (22) also compared the effects of corrective and positive feedback and found that both groups showed positive gains; he did not report whether or not the differences were significant. Seidman (23) studied the effect of corrective feedback and reported that the group receiving such feedback, compared to a group receiving no feedback, showed more motivation as measured by the number of optional drafts and revisions written. He did not, however, report whether the quality of writing improved.

Two studies investigated the effects of taped comments (as an alternative to written feedback). Coleman (9) reported that the tapes were more effective for students who scored low on a writing pretest. Andre (2) compared the effects on two groups and found no significant difference; he did report that students said they liked the taped comments and that they believed them to be effective.

One study by McColly (17), which investigated a variety of methods for teaching writing, reported that immediate feedback, presented in a tutoring situation, was not effective. The content of the feedback and the exact procedures by which it was presented were not explained. In Wolter's study (25), noted earlier, the groups receiving positive and corrective feedback received the feedback immediately before they started work on their next assignment. Neither McColly nor Wolter compared the effects

of feedback presented at different lengths of time, either before or after an assignment.

Two studies involved the use of feedback by students in rewriting papers. Neither Fellow's study (11) nor a study by Effros (10) found significant differences between groups who revised papers and those who did not.

Six studies investigated the effects of peer-feedback on improvement in writing. Two studies (1, 20) found no significant differences between groups receiving peer- and teacher-feedback. Lagana (15) reported the peer-feedback group made greater gains in three qualities than did a teacher-feedback group, but did not report significance of differences. Ford (12) reported that a peer-feedback group made greater gains on a grammar-usage test, but did not find significant differences. Two studies (18, 21) of peer-feedback involved an attempt to control the feedback by training students to use a rating scale for their own and their peers' papers; both reported significant differences between experimental and control groups.

Wolter (25), in his study noted earlier, also controlled the feedback provided to different groups by means of a form which listed specific writing behaviors for which information was to be provided. The teachers who provided corrective feedback to one group and positive to another followed the form. A third group of students received no feedback from teachers but provided themselves with feedback, using the same form, and showed significant gains. An earlier study by Lamberg (16), which led to Wolter's procedures, investigated the effect of programmed instruction in narrative writing. Built into the instruction was a feedback form, similar to Wolter's, which insured that students would give themselves positive, task-related feedback. The students showed significant gains.

Implications for Further Research

A review of the research leads one to suspect that certain aspects of feedback do not have desirable effects: negative feedback (the noting of the absence of desired qualities), provided in moderate or large quantity, in the form of written comments by teachers. Such a conclusion must be tentative because none of the studies of those aspects attempted to control strictly the type and content of the feedback. This failing may reflect traditional practice; it has been only recently that teachers have begun to make systematic attempts to identify basic elements of tasks by specifying measurable performance objectives. With such objectives, consistent and selective task-related feedback may be more likely.

Those studies which did show promising results involved the use of measurement instruments which provided for stricter control of the type and content of feedback. In Wolter's study, teachers and students were trained to use the same feedback form which was based on a task-analysis of narrative writing. The studies on peer-feedback that showed significant positive results also involved training students to use a measurement instrument.

Another implication of those studies is, in hind-

sight, a simple idea: If feedback, or information on performance, is to have desired effect, students have to understand it; it has to inform them. When students are trained to give themselves or their peers feedback, it may be more likely that they will understand the information than when they are dependent upon a variety of responses from their teachers, and they are less likely to ignore or dismiss information they have provided.

Further research is needed, especially since teachers seem to continue to use a variety of ways of providing feedback. In fact, a productive area for research would be in determining common practices by teachers as well as in determining what variables influence the kind of feedback teachers provide; e.g., does the use of measurable performance objectives lead to use of selective task-related feedback? Since positive feedback has been reported to have a positive effect on attitudes, long-range studies seem warranted to determine the effect of positive attitudes in improvement. Since there have been mixed results in studies involving negative, positive and corrective feedback, it would be useful to test the hypothesis that students with differing skills may benefit from different kinds, amounts, and conditions of feedback and to attempt to pin down those differences. Such research will need to control strictly for a limited number of aspects of feedback if results are to be helpful. □

References

- Allen, E.D. & Sutton, J. T. *The Effect of Practice and Evaluation on Improvement in Written Composition*. Cooperative Research Project 1993. Deland, Florida: Stetson University, 1964. (ERIC No. 001 274).
- Andre, R. J. *An Evaluation of the Use of Cassettes for Criticism of Student Writing*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 1972. (ERIC No. 059 616).
- Bata, E.J. *A Study of the Relative Effectiveness of Marking Techniques on Junior College Freshman English Composition*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 1972.
- Biberstine, R.D. *A Study of Selected Areas of Teacher Influence Upon the Written Composition of Fourth Graders*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 1966.
- Braddock, R., Lloyd-Jones, R., & Schoer, L. *Research in Written Composition*. Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1963.
- Brethower, D.M. *The Classroom as a Self-modifying System*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1970.
- Burton, D.L. & Arnold, L.V. *Effects of Writing and Intensity of Teacher Evaluation upon High School Students' Performance in Written Composition*. U.S.O.E. Cooperative Research Project 1523. Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1963.
- Clark, G. A. *Interpreting the Penciled Scrawl: A Problem in Teacher Theme Evaluation*. Unpublished master's thesis, The University of Chicago, 1969. (ERIC No. 039 241).
- Coleman, V. B. *A Comparison Between the Relative Effectiveness of Marginal-interlinear-terminal Commentary and of Audio-taped Commentary in Responding to Student Compositions*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1972.
- Effros, C. *An Experimental Study of the Effects of Guided Revision and Delayed Grades on Writing Proficiency of College Freshmen*. Final Report. West Haven, Conn.: New Haven University, 1973. (ERIC No. 079 764).
- Fellows, J. E. "The Influence of Theme-reading and Theme-correction on Eliminating Technical Errors in the Written Compositions of Ninth Grade Pupils." *University of Iowa Studies in Education*, 1932, 7, 7-44. Cited in J. S. Sherwin, *Four Problems in Teaching English: A Critique of Research*. Scranton: International Textbook, 1969.
- Ford, B. W. *The Effects of Peer Editing/Grading on the Grammar-Usage and Theme Composition Ability of College Freshmen*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1973.
- Gee, T. C. "Students' Responses to Teacher Comments." *Research in the Teaching of English*, 6 (1972), 212-221.
- Kelly, M. E. *Effects of Two Types of Teacher Response to Essays upon Twelfth Grade Students' Growth in Writing Performance*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, 1973.
- Lagana, J. R. *The Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Model for Teaching Composition which Utilizes Individualized Learning and Peer Group*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974.
- Lamberg, W. J. *Design and Validation of Instruction in Question-Directed Narrative Writing, Developed Through Discrimination Programming*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974. (ERIC No. 097 689).
- McColly, W. *Comparative Effectiveness of Composition Skills Learning Activities in the Secondary School*. USOE Cooperative Research Project 1528. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1963.
- Millet, N. C. "On Snarls and Straighteners." *Illinois English Bulletin*, 57 (1969), 13-18. (ERIC No. 040 215).

¹⁸ Olds, R. E. *Response Frequency in Reading Tasks Under Two Schedules of Information Feedback*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1970.

¹⁹ Pierson, H. *Teaching Writing*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

²⁰ Sager, C. *Improving the Quality of Written Composition Through Pupil Use of Rating Scales*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1973.

²¹ Schroeder, T. S. *The Effects of Positive and Corrective Written Teacher Feedback on Selected Writing Behaviors of Fourth Grade Children*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, 1973.

²² Sedman, E. *Marking Students' Composition: Implications of Achievement Motivation Theory*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1970.

²³ Stevens, A. E. *The Effects of Positive and Negative Evaluation on the Written Composition of Low Performing High School Students*. Unpublished doctoral

dissertation, Boston University, 1973.

²⁴ Wolter, D. R. *Effect of Feedback on Performance of a Creative Writing Task*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1975.

• Daniel R. Wolter is associated with Napa Valley Unified School District.

• Walter J. Lamberg teaches in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at The University of Texas at Austin.

TEXANS WRITE

F. Allen Briggs

This section of reviews of books by Texas authors or of books about Texas is a regular feature of English in Texas. Its editor is happy to welcome guest reviews for this issue.

Competency Based Reading

Olson, Joanne P. and Martha H. Dillner. *Learning to Teach Reading in the Elementary School*. Macmillan, 1976. 755 pp. + Inst. Man. \$8.95.

Learning to Teach Reading in the Elementary School presents concise organization and content of the principles and methods of teaching reading in a competency based format. Written by Joanne P. Olson of the University of Houston, Central Campus, and Martha H. Dillner of the University of Houston, Clear Lake City Campus, the book reflects competencies needed by beginning teachers of reading. The varied modules also provide information and techniques that can be utilized by experienced professionals with ultimate possibilities in the reading area.

The text is sequentially structured with an introductory flow chart designating the procedure for using each chapter. The organization of the content is excellent for the involved teacher who prefers chapter design in a consistent format. The book deals in specifics but has the flexibility to be utilized with either the traditional or the innovative classroom. The experienced professional could utilize the content in planning staff development programs, developing management systems in reading or for individual professional growth. Inside the front and back covers of the text is a chart coded to a number of textbooks for teaching elementary reading. For making comparisons, supplementary information, or more in-depth research, this chart is an informative time saver.

Worth the price of the book are three skills charts included in the text with an objective, testing procedure, and cross reference for teaching each skill. Beginning on page 245 are "Reading Skills for the Readiness Level Reader" specifying 28 readiness skills. Beginning on page 293 forty-four "Reading Skills for the Primary Reader" are outlined, and on page 323 fifty-one "Reading Skills for the Intermediate Reader" are introduced. The assessment procedures are pragmatic and professional and are

bonuses for persons who include this text in their own personal libraries.

The chapters are structured with six major sections and these are consistent through most of the book: 1) a *prerequisite* tells what the participant needs to know or to have completed to terminate that chapter; 2) a *rationale* includes a statement of why that chapter is important; 3) a delineated list of behavioral *objectives* informs the student what is expected; 4) a *pre-assessment* determines if the student already knows the data; 5) a list of *activities* allows the student to participate in the type of learning most expedient for him; and 6) an *information given* section consists of expository material found in the textbook.

Learning to Teach Reading in the Elementary School is precise, thorough, and authoritative and should receive ultimate priority by students and teachers who desire to be effective in teaching basic reading skills. □

Ree Walker Aguirre
Texas A&I at Laredo

Three Sons of the Land

Garmon, John, Tony Clark, and Jim Harris. *Llano Sons: Three from the Southwest*. Hobbs, N.M.: La Prensa, 1976, 42 pages.

There appears to be a resurgence of published poetry from talented poets in the Southwest. The recent appearance of *Caliban* by Walter McDonald is a noteworthy achievement in modern poetry. The most recent volume to come to my attention is *Llano Sons: Three from the Southwest*, a small volume containing the poetic efforts of three Texas-born writers: John Garmon, Tony Clark, and Jim Harris. Only Clark, who teaches at Paris Junior College, still resides here; the other two live in Hobbs, New Mexico, and are connected with New Mexico Junior College. All have academic ties, but their poetry is in the vein suggested by the title—sons of the land.

Those who live in the Southwest for very long realize how close we all are to the land upon which we live and from which, almost dotingly, we draw our strength. These young men illustrate that bond in a remarkable way. Garmon writes, for example, in his second poem in the volume, "Deeds and Titles":

i am glad not to have owned land
to have moved on through other men's fences
i have been free of ownership
so far as owning land goes

but i have been owned
by the land

(II. 1-6)

Not all of us own land—or perhaps want to own land—but the realization remains that no one in the Southwest is free from the compelling pull of the land. Garmon's imagery is striking, as evidenced in a poem entitled "Amarillo":

and 19 miles north silent
its placid face mirroring moon
the slender canadian river
dividing the breaks from the plains
the ghost of old tascosa riding
the naked hills the ancient
fingerless women soothing the fevers
cooling the brows of infants
against the heat the dust.

(ll. 19-27)

Garmon's other subjects include rain, drought, family recollections, and other subjects which touch those who still cling to the sense of community, a factor which makes the Southwest a unique section of the patchwork cultures which make up the United States.

Tony Clark, author of the second section of poems, utilizes much of the Old West, but mainly in his imagery. One example will perhaps illustrate better than any other:

Poet at the Party

I gravitate
To the gunfighter's chair
(In the corner,
Back to the wall);
It's natural motion
For the quick but uncertain.

His subjects include childhood experiences in his home town of Jacksboro, Texas, and further fulfill the promise of the title. He writes of the things which interest those close to the land—rain, snow, hunting, and even the difference between the humanistic approach to life and the brutal approach, cleverly but effectively worked out in his choice as a child on a Saturday morning between a Gene Autry film and *Bambi*. Of the choice, which was exceedingly difficult for him to make, he speaks the following in the last stanza of "The Day Gene Went Up Against Bambi":

Choking back sobs,
I dashed blindly to the booth
And cast my lot with Bambi.
After that first time
It was always easier.

(ll. 38-42)

The gun fighter situation suggested in the title is a very real "shootout" to determine the outcome of a significant step in the author's life.

Jim Harris covers more than just the Southwest in his poetry. But he remains in the West, and in an attitude less than worshipful he poignantly depicts the realities of life today. Perhaps the most striking aspect of Harris' work is his stark imagery. In "Llano Sun" he writes the following:

the llano white sun
set in motion oceans
of swirling
greyorange clouds
covering miles
of the empty rock land;

(ll. 1-6)

In a section entitled Western Travels, Harris gives his views of Taos, Arches National Monument, Grand Junction, San Francisco, and Montana.

All the poems in the volume reflect a personal, somewhat subjective view which aligns the poems with the romantic approach to form, but the poems are not romantic in tone or style. The bluntness of expression emphasizes the unromanticized view that these three young poets have of the life they have experienced. Mingled with the beauty of the subjects and the skill in poetic device, one finds a realistically presented view reflecting a studied look at this land that we in the Southwest love, despite its faults, for the richness of heritage which holds a Southwesterner to what the Albany dramatist Robert Nail termed "his prairie land." □

Lawrence Clayton
Department of English
Hardin-Simmons University

Neglected Heroes of Texas

Frantz, Joe B. *Texas: A Bicentennial History*. W. W. Norton & Company. 222 pp., photographs by A. Y. Owen, \$8.95.

Texas: A Bicentennial History, part of a series on *The States and the Nation* put out by W. W. Norton and Company, seems at first glance to be part of the hop-skip-and-jump school of popular Texas history: mention the Indians; hop over to Cabeza de Vaca and the Spaniards; skip to the Alamo, Sam Houston, and statehood; then take a long jump to the oil fields, LBJ, NASA, and Barbara Jordan—a kind of Six Flags Over Texas in fifteen easy chapters. Fortunately, Joe Frantz's book transcends the genre. He covers a lot of familiar territory, but some refreshing insights, seasoned with a relaxed, down-home wit, keep the journey interesting.

Frantz, a professor of history at The University of Texas at Austin and director of the Texas State Historical Association, is especially good at telling the Texas story from the point of view of often neglected, albeit fascinating, Texans, who had as much to do with making the state what it is as did Stephen F. Austin, Sam Houston, the Texas Rangers, and Lyndon Johnson.

Jane Long is a good example. Twenty-four-year-old Mrs. Long spent the harrowing winter of 1821 alone on Galveston Island except for her infant daughter and a black teen-aged servant named Kian. During the winter, she gave birth to another daughter. As she waited for word from her husband, who was in Mexico, she "shot birds, fished, looked across the bay at campfires of the Karankawa, and wondered whether they were as eager to barbecue her as she was simply to eat." Several months later, when the first white men came to Texas to stay, she and the young black girl in her mid-teens were there to meet them.

Lorenzo de Zavala—chicano *numero uno* in Texas, Frantz calls him—is another example. Texas'

DON'T BE AFRAID to break the rules!

J. F. Peirce

I remember the day in January of 1962 that I lost my grammatical virginity. That day I wrote a deliberate sentence fragment.

For me it was a traumatic experience far greater than my loss of sexual innocence. And not nearly so pleasurable.

A year before I had written an article on writers' conferences for *The Writer's Digest*, and the editor of *The Writer* had agreed to look at a similar article if I submitted it at once. So while proctoring a final examination, I dashed one off.

It wasn't difficult. It was largely an abstract of my earlier article in 500 words. But I encountered one problem. Most of the sentences were short, giving the article a staccato pace. But one sentence contained 49 words and brought the article to a grinding halt.

I tried every way I could to make the sentence three independent clauses. But the dependent relationships between the parts were so integral that it was impossible to do.

The solution to the problem was obvious. I could divide the sentence into three sentences, two of which were fragments dependent on the independent clause that preceded them to complete their meaning.

It took all my willpower to perform the amputation—for I knew blood, my blood, would flow.

For fifteen years I'd been telling my students that to write a sentence fragment was to commit a sin

worse than death. That if they got young girls into trouble, I would shake my head sadly but not condemn them. But that if they wrote themes pregnant with sentence fragments, I would drive them from my classroom door.

Therefore, it was with a trembling hand that I put a period at the end of the independent clause and began the dependent clause that followed with a capital letter.

Miracle of miracles—nothing happened! No blood flowed upon the page. The world did not come to an end.

And once the sin was committed, I found it easy to sin again. With a steady hand I put a period after the dependent clause and began the second dependent clause with a capital letter. It was a heady feeling—like having an affair.

Now I know that the rules are merely guidelines and that it isn't a sin to break them if you have a valid reason for what you do.

Since the purpose of writing is communication, anything that makes writing easier to understand is, not a sin, but a necessity.

We must give our readers every clue we can to help them solve the mystery of our writing and put its information to use. Even if it means that we must break all the rules to do so. □

• J. F. Peirce teaches English at Texas A&M University in College Station.

Neglected . . . continued from page 71.

first vice-president, Zavala had been minister to France under Santa Anna, but "away off in the security of Paris," Frantz writes, "he felt that Santa Anna was sabotaging the spirit of freedom and left for Texas to help restore that freedom." Less than a month later, he was dead.

And Frantz tells about the little black boy, second son of an ex-slave laborer, who in the late 1870's and early 1880's, was being taught musical discipline by a German music teacher in Texarkana. He grew up, left Texas, wrote a great many songs and an opera, and then disappeared from public view, "as forgotten as when he was playing on the streets of Texarkana." It wasn't until the 1970's that the world rediscovered Scott Joplin and learned "that he was the king of ragtime, a music combining the scale, key, and harmony of the white culture with the polyrhythmic drive which the blacks brought from Africa."

Joe Frantz has a feel for neglected heroes like Scott Joplin, but even when discussing those events in Texas history so well known they have merged into myth, he offers refreshing, gently revisionist, insights. About the siege of the Alamo, he writes that "like all heroic fights, it mixed a compound of courage and stupidity. Why a force of 187 men,

which the Alamo subsequently came to number, would give everything to stop a force of 5,000 men who were bound to win defies logic. Why Santa Anna, with all his generalship, would tie up 5,000 men for two weeks when all he had to do was march around the Alamo, leaving a small holding force behind, and catch the Texans deeper into the interior is difficult to discern But these are the types of emotional stands that people make which bring them unconscious immortality."

Texas: A Bicentennial History is not a comprehensive scholarly chronicle, nor does it pretend to be; for those whose appetites are whetted, Frantz has included a list of suggestions for further reading. But for the non-Texan who knows only the Texas of cowboys, the Alamo, oil men, and the Astrodome, but who would like to know more, and for the Texan who knows little beyond the official version he learned back in seventh-grade Texas history and who senses the story is much richer, Joe Frantz's book is a good place to start. A collection of superb photographs by A. Y. Owen is also included. □

Joe Holley
Dallas Community College